DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 128 TM 033 185

AUTHOR Rhine, Sarah; Smith, Elizabeth
TITLE Appropriate Assessment of Primary Grade Students.
PUB DATE 2001-05-00
NOTE 50p.; Master of Arts Action Research Project, Saint Xavier and IRI/Skylight Field-Based Master's Program.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses (040)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Tests; Action Research; Educational Testing; Elementary School Students; *Performance Based Assessment; Primary Education; Standardized Tests; *Student Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This research project focuses on the problem of the inappropriate assessment of primary grade students. The targeted group was first graders in a suburban elementary school. While taking tests, students revealed a low performance in comparison with their daily performance. They also exhibited frustration and a high stress level. Current research in assessment in education shows several causes for this problem, including reliance on traditional assessment methods. A variety of authentic assessment tools, such as portfolios and rubrics, were used to assess the first grade students more appropriately. The students benefited from the assessments and had a greater understanding of their own learning. The classroom teachers and parents also benefited from the implementation of authentic assessments, in that a more accurate portrayal of the student resulted. Postintervention data indicated a decrease in students' frustration and stress level during performance assessments as compared to that experienced during standardized achievement tests. Performance and authentic assessment results gave teachers and parents a clearer indication of the students' progress, while the results of the standardized achievement tests were not as useful. Ten appendixes contain surveys, rubrics, and other materials used in the study. (Contains 3 figures, 4 tables, and 19 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

TM

ED 456 128

APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT OF PRIMARY GRADE STUDENTS

Sarah Rhine
Elizabeth Smith

An Action Research Project Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the

School of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching and Leadership

St. Xavier University and SkyLight

Field-Based Masters Program

Chicago, Illinois

May 2001

TM033185

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. Rhine

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

SIGNATURE PAGE

This project was approved by

Ed.D.

Advisor

Advisor

Beverly Gulley

Dean, School of Education

Appropriate Assessment of Primary Grade Students
Sarah Rhine and Elizabeth Smith
May 2001

ABSTRACT

The research project focuses on the problem of the inappropriate assessment of primary grade students. Some of the current practices of evaluating children in the early grades do not accurately display the students' learning. The targeted group of students were first graders in a suburban elementary school. While taking tests, students revealed a low performance in comparison with their daily performance. They also exhibited frustration and a high stress level.

Current research in the area of assessment in education shows several causes for this problem. There is a need for data on students that requires giving of standardized tests. Educators have always assessed students in traditional ways, and have not updated their testing methods. Some teachers are not given alternatives to traditional ways. Often the classroom teacher's observations are questioned for validity, and not valued as assessment tools. Schools receive a great deal of pressure to succeed in state mandated tests.

A variety of authentic assessment tools, such as portfolios and rubrics, were used to assess the first grade students more appropriately. The students benefited from the assessments and had a greater understanding of their own learning. The classroom teacher and parents also benefited from the implementation of authentic assessments, in that a more accurate portrayal of the student resulted.

Post observation data indicated a decrease in students' frustration and stress level during performance assessments as compared to standardized achievement tests. Performance and authentic assessment results gave teachers and parents a clearer indication of the students' progress, while the results of the standardized achievement tests were not as useful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 - PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT 1

General Statement of the Problem 1

Immediate Problem Context 1

Surrounding Community 2

National Context of the Problem 3

CHAPTER 2 - PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION 4

Problem Evidence 4

Probable Causes 9

CHAPTER 3 - THE SOLUTION STRATEGY 11

Literature Review 11

Project Objectives 15

Action Plan 15

Assessments 15

CHAPTER 4 - PROJECT RESULTS 17

Historical Description of the Intervention 17

Presentation and Analysis of Results 19

Conclusions and Recommendations 20

REFERENCES 22

APPENDICES .....

Appendix A 24

Teacher Survey

Appendix B 26

Parent Survey

Appendix C 27

Portfolio Form

Appendix D 28

Student Opinion Rubric

Appendix E 29

Student Behavior Rubric

Appendix F 30

Student Organization Rubric

Appendix G 31

Teacher Writing Rubric

Appendix H 32

Teacher Listening Rubric

Appendix I 33

Self-Reflection Form

Appendix J 34

Student Observation Tallylist

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

Some of the students of the targeted first grade class exhibited a lack of success on academic assessments. Academic assessments are defined as national standardized tests, district-created assessments of state goals, and textbook chapter tests. Evidence of this problem existed in the comparison of students' daily performance to their testing performance. Further evidence included students' stress levels, students' inabilities to express knowledge in writing, and confusion in the interpretation of directions.

Immediate Problem Context

The action research site is a neighborhood school located in a subdivision and is surrounded by two playgrounds and two parking lots. The street is used primarily by travelers to the school and by district-owned buses, which transport many of the students to school. Of the students that attend the school, 87% live in homes and 13% live in apartments.

The targeted site has an enrollment of 539 students. The students' ethnic make-up is 82.7% Caucasian, 6.3% African-American, 3.5% Hispanic, and 7.4% Asian/Pacific Islander. The school has a 96.8% attendance rate and 9.4% mobility, which is lower than the state average of 18.1%. Chronic truancy is not a problem in the school. An average first grade class size is 25 students. According to the district's school report card, the operating expenditure per pupil is $5,466.

Of the 105 teachers in the district, 85.2% are female and 14.8% are male. The average teaching experience is 13.0 years, and 36% of teachers have earned a master's degree. The district's teachers are 99% Caucasian and 1% Asian/Pacific Islander. The average teacher salary is $41,759.

The school has several programs which are available to students on an as-needed basis. Any student with special needs is fully included in a regular education classroom. A student's

special needs may be physical or mental disabilities, including autism, Down's Syndrome, and cerebral palsy. An instructional assistant is provided for these students to implement adapted curriculum. Other students qualify for additional resources and have IEPs (Individual Educational Plans). Reading Recovery is a program for low reading-ability students to learn reading strategies enabling them to become independent readers. It is a first grade program which allows the students to work individually with a teacher for 30 minutes a day, five days a week, for 18 weeks. It is used by 8-10 students per year. Speech, occupational and physical therapy, and the services of a social worker are offered to students with special needs. The school also offers before and after school day care to families needing this service.

Surrounding Community

The action research is conducted in a southwest suburban community. The mean income of families in the community is $75,000. The average cost of a house in the community is $200,000 with a range of $115,000 to $750,000, according to the Chicago Tribune web site. The town includes three elementary school districts. The research site's district has three K-6 buildings and one junior high school. A unique feature in this district is that the junior high school graduates attend two different high school districts.

The district offers four sections of all-day kindergarten. This is a new program and all classes are located in one of the three elementary schools. Children from the other elementary schools that attend are bused from their home school. In addition each home school has half day kindergarten available. Each elementary school currently houses the sixth grade, however, in 2001 the sixth graders will be moving to the junior high school in order to create a middle school environment.

There are numerous ways that students in the district are tested each year. The state-mandated Illinois State Achievement Tests (ISAT) are given to students in third, fourth, and fifth grades. The district places a strong emphasis on the students' success on these tests. Administration and faculty meet and work together to plan strategies to improve student achievement on the ISAT. All the grade levels are given the Stanford Achievement Tests and first grade students take the Otis Lennon Ability Test.

In addition, the district has been developing performance based assessments to be given at each grade level, from first through eighth. These assessments were created by teachers who

served on strategic studies committees. The assessments are aligned to the state goals and standards, with the intention of improving the curriculum. At each grade level there are 7-12 assessments in the subject areas of language arts, math, social studies, and science to be given throughout the year. Finally, teachers give textbook chapter tests when a concept has been taught to evaluate the students' knowledge of the material.

National Context of the Problem

How to best assess students has been an area of debate and concern for decades. Questions continually arise about the reliability and validity of assessments given to students at all grade levels. Deciding what and how to assess are key aspects. "Standards and testing may be the greatest challenge facing public schools in this new millennium." (Chase, p. 5, 2000). Schools across the country are pondering the methods of assessing their students and the curriculum. Education reformers have been asking the following questions about standardized tests since the 1920s: Do these tests accurately measure critical thinking and problem-solving skills? Do they assess children's performance fairly (Neill, 2000)? A campaign to reform assessments has begun and is of interest to many educators.

According to the Education Commission of the States, 20 states now hold schools accountable for test scores (Neill, 2000). Chase (2000) writes, "Applying one-size-fits-all-standards to a world full of 'savage inequalities' is grossly negligent" (p. 5). Only 7% of Virginia's schools are living up to the state testing standards. Educators need to determine what expectations are realistic and appropriate for student achievement at each grade level. Effective classroom assessment is the concern of most educators.

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

In order to show that a problem exists in the assessment of primary students, a survey was given to first through third grade teachers at several different school sites and districts. There were 45 teachers from 8 schools within 5 districts.

The survey was developed in order to document the problem of the use of assessments at the primary grades (Appendix A). In the survey, teachers were asked to respond to the various types of assessments they administer in their classrooms. They were also asked which assessments they felt were the most and least helpful in evaluating their students.

Figure 1 shows the responses that teachers gave to answer the question of what types of assessments they use in the classroom. The graph clearly shows that teachers are using many different types of assessments. Teachers are required by the district or state to give certain assessments: standardized tests, I. Q. tests, and district or local assessments. In addition to the tests teachers are required to give, teachers are also utilizing other assessment tools.

Information that was also gathered from the survey was the number of district/local assessments given to the students. The amount ranged from 2 to 31, with an average of 19 local assessments given.

Teachers also responded to the types of chapter tests given in various academic subjects. Math was the subject most often assessed by using the tests at the end of the chapter. Other tests were language arts (reading and English), science, and social studies. These tests are provided by the textbook company.

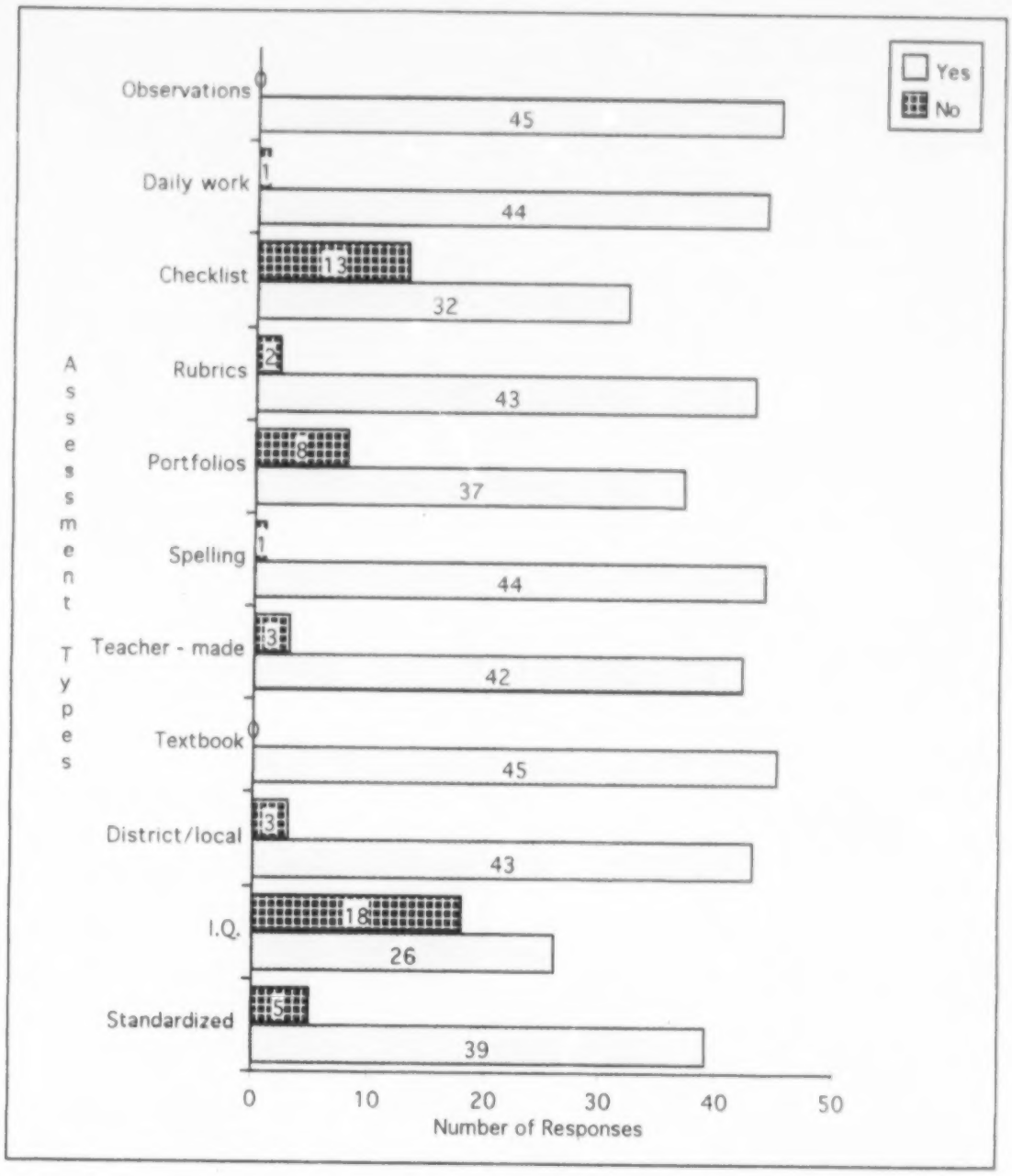


Figure 1. The number of yes/no responses of assessment methods given by primary teachers.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

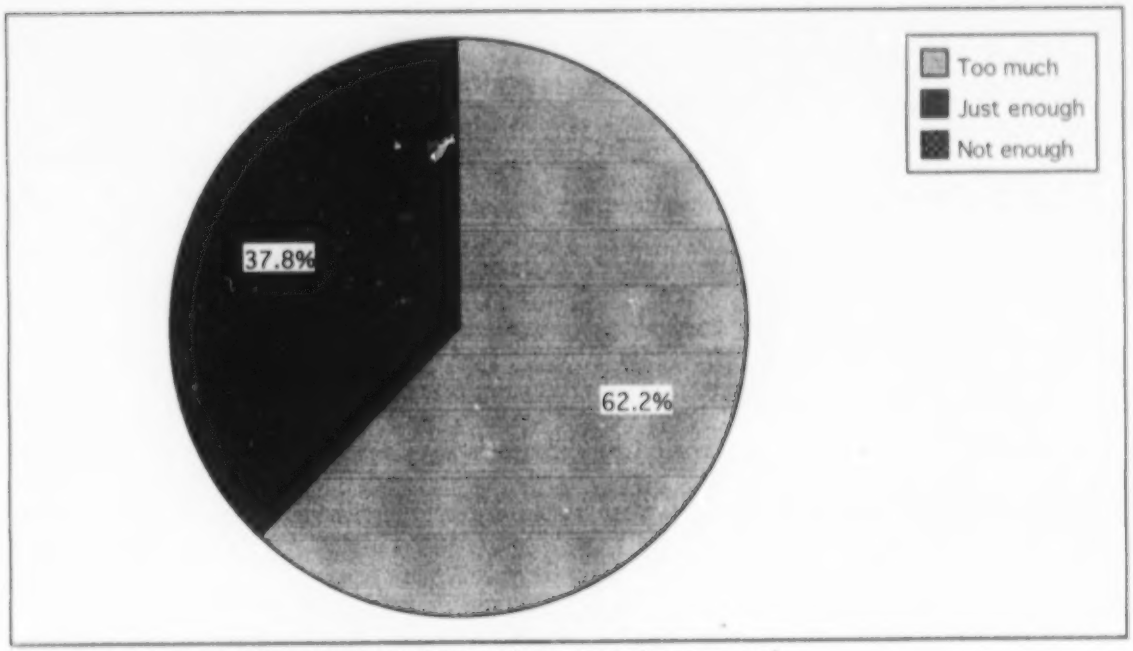


Figure 2 - How often teachers feel their students are being assessed

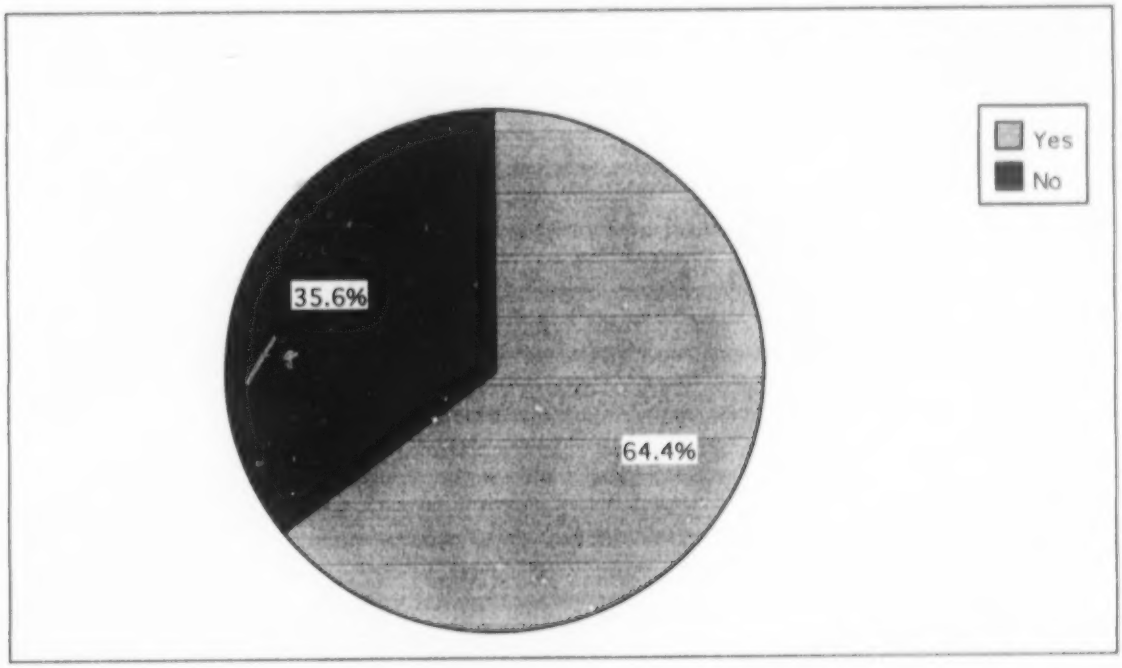


Figure 3 - Responses teachers gave about pressure to teach "for the test"

Figure 2 represents the responses of the teachers surveyed in regards to how often they feel their students are being assessed. Nearly two-thirds of the teachers felt that their students are being assessed "too much," while one-third felt that their students are being assessed "just enough." No teachers responded that their students are not assessed often enough.

Teachers were also asked whether they feel pressured to teach "for the test." Figure 3 represents their responses. Again, almost two-thirds of the teachers surveyed felt that they did feel pressure to teach for the test. Many of the remaining teachers, who answered that they do not feel pressure to teach for the test, have either first or second grade classes where the students are not tested at the state level.

Teachers were asked to list the assessments that they feel are most and least helpful in evaluating their students. Figure 4 lists the assessment tools that teachers prefer to use in their classroom and the ones that are not as helpful.

Table 1.

Assessments Teacher Feel Are Most and Least Helpful.

Most	Least
1. Observations	1. Standardized tests
2. Daily work	2. Local/district assessments
3. Textbook tests	3. ISAT's
5. Portfolios	5. Textbook tests
4. Teacher-made tests	4. I.Q. tests
6. Checklists	6. Rubrics
7. Rubrics	
8. Spelling tests	

The final part of the survey asked teachers to write comments or opinions about assessments. The comments gave further insight as to how much teachers value different kinds of assessments. The following are excerpts from their comments:

"Assessment is best when it fits the students' needs. It needs to drive your instruction so that what you're teaching is what the students need to learn."

"Some of the assessments take up more time than is justified for the end result achieved, and take away from active and useful teaching time. Informal assessments and teacher observation

should be given more merit."

"Assessments are a tool to help the teacher and student reach his/her (the students') learning potential."

"There is no time left to teach! Kids are not allowed time to assimilate information and there is a constant push as if 'more' is better."

Further evidence of a problem exists in the behavior that students display during formal testing situations. Standardized tests were administered to the targeted first grade classes in the area of reading comprehension. Simultaneously teacher researchers recorded students' behavior on an observation tallysheet (Appendix J).

Table 2 shows the data that were collected during the testing. The figure is the average of both classes during a standardized reading test. Students showed signs of stress while they were working, such as nervousness, distractability, and asking for help. In addition, teacher researchers noted several students guessing answers and others reading parts out loud to assist in their understanding, which was distracting to others.

Table 2.
The Average Number of Students Who Exhibited Anxious Behaviors During a Standardized Reading Test.

Nervousness	4
Copying	3
Distractibility	3
Crying	1
Asking for help	5
Doodling	1
Giving up	3
Fidgeting	4

Probable Causes

There are a variety of causes for the problem of the inappropriate assessing of primary students. One of the causes is a need for scores and data on students that requires teachers to assess their students with standardized tests. "Accountability is a necessary part of education" (International Reading Association, 1999, p. 261). The testing results are available to the public to provide a basis for comparing individual schools as well as school districts. It gives the public a partial understanding of how well the schools are doing (International Reading Association, 1999).

There is a pressure for higher test scores from parents, administration, the local school board, and the community in general. People want to be informed how well the students measure in comparison to surrounding schools and districts. Teachers are pressured to align classroom assessments and classroom instruction with the statewide test's multiple-choice assessment target so that the students will score well (Popham, 1995). "As the stakes associated with an educational test rise, teachers tend to emphasize instructionally the content embodied in the test" (Popham, 2000, p. 172).

Sometimes assessments are administered to students for the sole purpose of determining if the child requires additional support. Based on the outcome of the assessment, the student may qualify for remedial or gifted instruction. There are requirements by the state for school districts to administer standardized tests to students. The results of these tests determine whether the school receives funding for special reading programs.

Another cause for the problem is that teachers have given students traditional tests in the classroom. Teachers give tests to evaluate the students' progress. Teachers need to know whether the students have learned the material taught or if they should stop and reteach. "For elementary teachers, determining students' mastery (is) the typical assessment purpose" (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992, p. 44). Classroom assessments are also given to provide feedback to parents through report cards and conferences.

The traditional tests being given in the classroom include short answer quizzes, right and wrong responses, and simple recall of facts and information. One result from these traditional assessments is that the facts are forgotten over time because they are isolated and recalled only for the test. They are usually unrelated to real life situations. Another result from traditional tests is that the responses required for the tests do not reflect the students' abilities or strengths (Weber, 1999).

Additionally, some students are not challenged by traditional tests, while others are set up for failure.

The results of a test are often accepted more readily as being factual and accurate than a teachers' informal observations of a child. The results of a test are viewed as "proof" of a student's academic level and, therefore, not questioned by parents or administrators.

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

There has been extensive research in the area of testing in education. Research does show two clear solutions to the problem of inappropriate testing at the primary level: decrease the use of standardized tests, and increase the use of authentic assessments in the classroom.

There are several types of standardized tests that children can be required to take. Certain tests measure student achievement while others measure a student's aptitude. Standardized tests can be norm referenced or criterion referenced. Norm referenced evaluations compare a student's achievement to other students' results (Cangelosi, 2000). Criterion referenced tests compare a student's results with a predetermined standard and are not influenced by others. These tests are multiple choice and can be "high stakes," and the results may affect curriculum, instruction, school quality, and children's futures (Neill, 2000). The problem is that these tests may not actually be the best measure of a student's learning.

Wiggins (1989) makes the statement that "a standardized test of intellectual ability is a contradiction in terms" (p. 704). Standardized tests do not necessarily show learning. They focus on the recall of facts and fragments of learning. Knowing facts should not be the most important goal of instruction (Neill, 2000).

When students take standardized tests, critical thinking skills are rarely used in answering the questions. "The tests do not require students to apply what they have learned" (Ainsworth & Christinson, 1998, p.1). Students are also pressured to answer questions correctly, sending them the message that "mere right answers, put forth by going through the motions, are adequate signs of ability" (Wiggins, 1989, p. 706).

Standardized tests are given to children in schools as early as kindergarten. This, however, may not be the best practice for students that age. Testing is emotionally hard on young children

because they become frustrated with the test (Andersen, 1998). Since children at an early age have difficultly with the technicalities of taking standardized tests, "the validity of the tests are less reliable in the primary grades...Young children are inexperienced in taking tests. They have difficulty following directions and determining correct responses" (Jacobson, 1998, p. 168).

According to Popham (2000), a nationally recognized expert on educational testing and assessment practices:

> The use of standardized achievement tests with children, at least until the end of the third grade, is a definite no-no. The validity of score-based inferences that such testing will yield is likely to be inadequate. Until children reach grade four, the use of traditional paper and pencil tests should be sharply limited. (p. 145)

Another drawback of standardized tests is that the results are not helpful to the teacher and are often time-consuming. In a study conducted by Stiggins and Conklin (1992), teachers pointed out problems and limitations of standardized tests. The results "failed to provide needed diagnostic information...the tests seemed unrelated to instructional goals in that the content of the tests did not match what they were teaching" (p.72).

Taking tests is time-consuming for the students and the teacher. "Test preparation time takes away classroom hours that ought to be spent on instruction. Even worse some teachers end up teaching specifically toward the actual test items" (Popham, 2000, p. 69). If teachers teach "to the test," then the results of the test become invalid.

Decreasing the use of standardized tests means more time is spent and value placed on authentic assessment. Authentic assessment is a term with several meanings. It is evaluating a student by "asking for the behavior the learning is intended to produce" (McTighe & Ferrara, 1994, p. 3). It is a student's performance, and the performance should be practicing a concept that has been learned, rather than recalling bits and pieces of information. Authentic assessment puts the student's knowledge to use in a real-world context. Tasks are viewed as part of the learning process. "The term 'authentic' is used to convey the idea that performance assessments should engage students' in applying knowledge and skills" (p. 15).

One type of authentic assessment is a performance assessment. When a child is involved in a performance assessment he or she completes an activity related to the learning outcomes. There

are usually several steps required and also several possible solutions to the question asked (McTighe & Ferrara, 1994).

The benefits of performance assessments are for both the student and teacher. Teachers are able to observe the desired skill directly, and students are motivated and challenged. This type of assessment also represents an alternative to traditional paper and pencil tests (Popham, 1995). The use of performance tasks "allows students to demonstrate a much wider and richer level of understanding" (Ainsworth & Christinson, 1998, p. 2).

Rubrics can be used in conjunction with performance assessments as a tool to score the quality of the product. It is "a scoring guide that differentiates between levels of development in a specific area of performance or behavior" (Rose, 1999, p. 30).

Rubrics are used primarily to score a project, essay, or other longer assignment. They "enhance student learning in that they describe expectations, focus on criteria that will be used to judge the merit of work, and thereby add direction and guidance for students" (Weber, 1999, p. 175). If rubrics are used properly in the classroom, they can be "teaching tools that support student learning and the development of sophisticated thinking skills" (Andrade, 2000, p. 13).

Portfolios are also being utilized in the classroom as a type of authentic assessment. A portfolio is an organized collection of a student's work and follows the viewpoint that "assessment should be a part of instruction, not apart from it" (Popham, 1995, p. 163). It is, like performance assessment, an alternative to traditional testing.

Teachers find that having their students use portfolios makes assessment a daily part of instruction. The process of using portfolios includes collecting work samples, selecting the work to go into the portfolio, reflecting upon the reason a particular item was chosen, and setting goals for future learning. The work placed in the portfolios can be the student's choice. The student and teacher then conduct a conference. The student's portfolio can also be shared with parents to provide information about how their child is doing (Allen, 1998).

Portfolios have many benefits in the classroom. One is that portfolios allow assessment to be ongoing. Hansen (1998) writes that "the ever-presence of their (the students') portfolios among them energizes the children" (p. 31). Teachers are choosing to assess their students through the use of portfolios because they allow students to display their individual strengths, regardless of ability. "Howard Gardner recommends the use of portfolios because they provide a diverse variety of

students' work" (Weber, 1999, p. 90). In addition, a student learns the value of self-reflection (Popham, 1995).

A teacher's observations of the students in his or her classroom can be a valuable form of assessment. "Teachers can and do often draw inferences about students' affective traits based on their observations of and judgments about student behavior" (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992, p. 89). Elementary teachers in particular often find more importance in observation than objective testing in assisting the instruction process.

Through observation teachers know which students understand and have mastered a skill and which individuals have further questions. They also know which students can help others, ask higher level questions, or need reteaching to understand what has been taught. Because of the teacher/student relationship that has been built up, "the teacher is the only one who knows what the student can or cannot do consistently" (Wiggins, 1989, p. 709). Observations allow teachers to obtain different information than traditional testing methods can provide (Taylor, 1993).

Another form of authentic assessment is a teacher's use of checklists. Checklists contain categories for evaluation and rating options for each category (McTighe & Ferrara, 1994). Checklists can be used while teaching a lesson or leading a discussion, and are also helpful when observing students while they are at work. These forms may be "useful for reporting to parents, setting up a conference with students to discuss their work, or filing to observe specific progress over time" (Weber, 1999, p. 216).

Checklists can also be used to evaluate students' work. Sancken (1998) writes of grading her students' work, "I have discovered that I can achieve better results by using a carefully constructed checklist as opposed to written comments" (p. 73). Checklists are convenient and easy to use and, therefore, can be used to assess students' work more often.

There are many types of assessments that can be given to children. Teachers can use a variety of methods to "diagnose students' strengths and needs, plan and adjust instruction, and provide feedback to students and parents regarding progress and achievement" (McTighe & Ferrara, 1994, p. 4). The purpose of assessment should be to improve learning and teaching, and this can best be done through the use of authentic assessments (Neill, 2000). Sound assessment on a day-to-day basis promises to enhance both the quality and efficiency of instruction (Stiggins & Conklin, 1992).

Project Objectives

As a result of using authentic assessment tools during the period of September, 2000, to January, 2001, the first grade students from the targeted class will be assessed more appropriately for their age as measured by portfolios, rubrics, checklists, informal observations, self-reflection, and performance activities.

In order to accomplish the objective, the following processes are necessary:

1. Assessment tools that are authentic, such as portfolios, will be developed and used in the classroom.

2. Surveys and interviews that inform about assessment use and opinions by teachers and parents will be written and given.

3. Lessons that show differing student behaviors will be developed and observed.

Project Action Plan

The action research will take place in two first grade classrooms and will last approximately 18 weeks. It will begin with the new school year and conclude at the end of the first semester. The action plan includes the following: implementing classroom assessments, observing testing situations, surveying teachers, and surveying parents.

Surveys:

The teacher surveys concerning classroom assessments will be conducted in October of the research period. Teachers from grades one through three will be surveyed. Surveys will be given to nine schools representing five school districts. One individual will collect the surveys at each school. The surveys will then be analyzed by the researchers. (Appendix A)

Parents will also be surveyed at the end of the first grading period as to the assessments their child used in the classroom. Parents will rate each assessment according to its helpfulness in gaining a clear picture of their child's academic performance. (Appendix B)

Assessments

Portfolios:

Teachers will begin use of portfolios by giving students folders for the collection of their work. Students will choose one item per subject to include in the portfolio. At the end of each quarter students will conference with the teacher and evaluate items in the portfolio. During the

quarter students will conference with the teacher and evaluate items in the portfolio. During the student-teacher conference, students will reflect upon three items in the portfolio. The student's portfolio will be shared with parents at parent-teacher conferences. (Appendix C)

Rubrics:

During the research period five rubrics will be used as evaluation tools. The rubrics will be for both teacher and student use. These will be shared with parents at parent-teacher conferences. (Appendix D - H)

Checklists:

During the research period, two checklists will be used as evaluation tools. These checklists will be in the areas of reading and writing. The checklists will be used by the teacher for evaluating the students learning progress in these subjects.

Informal Observations:

During the research period teachers will record informal observations on the students in their class as they spontaneously occur. Observations will be used by the teacher for evaluating the students, and will be shared with the parents at parent-teacher conferences.

Self-Reflections:

During the research period students will complete a self-reflection form each Friday. It will be checked by the teacher and sent home to the parents on that same day. (Appendix I)

Test Observations:

The teachers will observe the students of their classroom in two test situations, performance and standardized, both for the same subject area. The teachers will complete an observation tallysheet of the students' behavior during each test. (Appendix J)

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this action research was to implement a variety of authentic assessment tools in two primary grade classrooms. Interventions included the use of portfolios, rubrics, self-reflection, informal teacher observations, and performance assessments.

The project began by distributing a teacher survey regarding assessments administered in their classrooms. The survey is found in Appendix A. The survey was conducted to determine whether a problem existed in the area of student assessment methods. The teachers' responses indicated that a variety of assessment tools, both traditional and authentic, are being implemented in primary grade classrooms. Teachers also responded to whether they feel their students are being tested "too much," "just enough," or "not enough." More teachers responded that their students are assessed "too much." No one responded "not enough."

Teachers were also questioned about feeling pressured to teach "for the test." Nearly two-thirds of the teachers felt pressure to teach "for the test." The results of the survey did not directly affect the interventions that were implemented. It did, however, provide interesting information about teachers' opinions in the area of assessments.

The first assessment tool that was introduced to the students was self-reflection. Students used a form (Appendix I) at the end of each week to reflect on what they had learned and their strengths and weaknesses. This tool was used consistently every week throughout the research period.

Another assessment tool that was implemented early in the school year was the use of portfolios. Students received a file folder to use as their portfolio, and also were instructed as to how the portfolio would be used. Students completed a form to attach to each artifact that was placed in the portfolio (Appendix C). The plan called for students to place items from each subject

weekly into the portfolios. After several weeks, the plan changed and students were given liberty to place new items in their portfolios as they desired.

Teacher observations, as an assessment tool, were used throughout the research period. Teachers documented on an index card information that was gained from observing each student during the school day. The observation was dated. These observations were shared with parents at first-quarter conferences.

Also prior to first-quarter conferences, teacher researchers used two rubrics to assist in evaluating students' academic progress for the report card (Appendix G-H). Students completed three rubrics which required them to self-reflect on their behavior in class, their organization of their desk and supplies, and their opinion of school subjects (Appendix D-F). These rubrics were shared with parents and discussed.

The original plan called for the use of checklists as assessment tools. As the weeks progressed during the research period, the teacher researchers deviated from the action plan. Checklists were not implemented in the classrooms.

At first-quarter parent-teacher conferences the assessment tools, including portfolios, rubrics, teacher observations, and self-reflection were discussed. Some of the assessment types had been shared with parents during the first quarter, and others were explained at the conference. Parents were asked to complete a survey about how beneficial the assessment tools were to them in understanding their child's progress (Appendix B).

During the research period a performance assessment was given to the students in the subject of reading. An observation tallysheet (Appendix J) was completed while students were involved in reading individually to the teacher. The assessment required each student individually to read a short passage about polar bears and answer comprehension questions orally.

Standardized tests were administered at the end of the research period. Only reading tests were given to the students. Teachers completed an observation tallysheet while students were completing the standardized tests.

Overall the researchers followed the basic action plan. Changes were made in that the use of portfolios was slightly altered and checklists were completely omitted.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

In order to show the difference in students' behavior during testing situations, both standardized and performance tests were given and observed. The same subject matter, reading comprehension, was assessed in both testing types. Table 3 shows a comparison of the two testing situations. As shown in the data collected, the students displayed fewer instances of anxious behaviors during the performance assessment.

Table 3.
A comparison of the average number of students that displayed anxious behaviors in both standardized and performance-based tests.

	Standardized	Performance
Nervousness	4	1
Copying	3	0
Distracted	5	0
Crying	1	0
Asking for help	4	6
Doodling	2	0
Giving up	3	0
Fidgeting	4	1

In addition, academic information about the child was gained by the teachers immediately following the performance assessment. The teacher could tell how the child's fluency, sight word knowledge, and comprehension were improving. The standardized test, however, did not provide academic information about the children, as the results were not available during the same school year.

During the research period, authentic assessments were given to the first grade students. In order to find out the effectiveness of the assessments from the parents' viewpoint, a survey was given at first-quarter conferences. Table 4 shows the results of the survey.

Table 4.
Parent responses to how beneficial the authentic assessments were in informing them of their child's progress.

	Not very much	Somewhat	Very
Self-reflection	0	8	18
Rubrics	1	7	18
Portfolios	1	6	19
Daily work	0	7	19
Report card	4	8	15
Teacher observations	0	4	21

As shown in Table 4, most parents indicated that the authentic assessments were either very beneficial or somewhat beneficial in helping them learn about their child's academic progress.

In the final part of the survey, parents were asked to write their opinions of the assessment types. The following are excerpts from their comments:

"Combining these assessment tools gives me the most information about my child."

"It is an interesting concept to have my child rate herself (on a rubric)."

"The portfolios help us see the progression of (our child's) work."

"The most beneficial feedback comes from the teacher observations."

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers found, after implementing a variety of authentic assessments in two first grade classrooms, that these tools are appropriate for primary grade students. Many benefits surfaced throughout the research period. The advantages of authentic assessments are seen by teachers, parents, and students.

One goal of assessing students is to gain information about progress and learning that have taken place in the classroom. Tools such as observation and rubrics provided immediate feedback to the teacher for further planning. Portfolios gave teachers insight as to the progress made since the beginning of the school year. Weekly self-reflections allowed teachers to evaluate each student's writing progress, including grammar, spelling, and handwriting. It also provided students the opportunity to express themselves, affirm personal growth, and set personal goals.

students the opportunity to express themselves, affirm personal growth, and set personal goals.

The survey given to the parents indicated that authentic assessments gave them helpful academic information about their child. The parent survey results suggested that non-traditional assessment types such as rubrics and portfolios were positive additions. They supplemented the report card and provided parents with a greater understanding of their child's learning. The researchers were encouraged by the positive acceptance and strong parental support.

The authentic assessments used in the classroom were also appreciated by the students. The behaviors that were observed during performance assessments suggested that the students felt more comfortable and less anxious than during traditional testing. They may not have realized that an evaluation was actually taking place; therefore, more valid results were achieved. The student rubrics, self-reflections, and portfolios provided each individual an opportunity to take ownership in the learning process.

The teacher researchers discussed the advantages of implementing a variety of authentic assessments, as well as any disadvantages. It is important for educators to understand that it is not as effective to attempt too many different assessments with their students. The classroom teacher should choose the tools that are most beneficial to gain helpful information about the students in his/her classroom.

Assessments will continue to be an important part of the educational process. The results of the research project suggest that authentic assessments are, in fact, appropriate tools for primary grade students. The benefits are felt by teacher, parents, and students.

References

Ainswork, L. Christinson, J. (1998). Student generated rubrics: An assessment model to help all students succeed. Orangeburg, NY: Dale Seymour Publications.

Allen, D. (1998). Assessing student learning: From grading to understanding. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Andersen, S. R. (1998, July). The trouble with testing. Young Children, 53 (4), p. 25-29.

Andrade, H. G. (2000, February). Using rubrics to promote thinking and learning. Educational Leadership, 57 (5), p. 13-18.

Cangelosi, J. S. (2000). Assessment strategies for monitering student learning. New York: Addison Wesley Longman.

Chase, B. (2000, February.) Tests and Sensibility: Taking a stand on standards and high-stakes testing. NEA Today. p. 5.

Hansen, J. (1998) When learners evaluate. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

International Reading Association. (1999, November) High stakes assesments in reading. The Reading Teacher,53, (3), p. 257-264.

Jacobson, J. R. (1998). How is my first grader doing in school? What to expect and how to help. New York: Simon & Schuster.

McTighe, J. Ferrara, S. (1994). Assessing learning in the classroom. Washington, D. C.: National Education Association.

Neill, M. (2000) Old tests in new clothes. Scholastic Instructor. January/February, p. 31-34.

Popham, W. J. (1995). Classroom assessment: What teachers need to know. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Popham, W. J. (2000). Testing! Testing!: What every parent should know about school tests. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Rose, M. (1999, March). Make room for rubrics. Instructor, p. 30-31.

Sancken, C. M. (1998, Summer). Organizing a first grade assessment program. Illinois Reading Council Journal, 26, (3), p. 72-75.

Stiggins, R. J. Conklin, N. F. (1992) In teachers' hands: Investigating the practices of classroom assessment. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Taylor, D. (1993). From the child's point of view. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Wiggins, G. (1989). A true test: Toward more authentic and equitable assessment. Phi Delta Kappan, 70, p. 703-713.

Weber, Ellen. (1999). Student assessment that works: A practical approach. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Appendix A

Primary Grade Assessments

Dear Colleague:

We are researching the assessment tools teachers use in their classrooms. Would you please complete this survey about different assessments you use to evaluate your students? Thank you! Your help is GREATLY appreciated and your responses will be kept confidential. School District names will be given pseudonyms.

School District:_____

Grade Level: 1 2 3

Do you use...

1. Standardized tests? Yes No
   Name: _____
   When given: _____
2. I.Q. tests? Yes No
3. District/Local assessments? (written by your district) Yes No
   If yes, how many?_____
4. Textbook chapter tests? Yes No
   Subjects: _____
5. "Teacher made" tests? Yes No
6. Spelling tests? Yes No
7. Portfolios? Yes No
8. Rubrics? Yes No
9. Observation checklists? Yes No
10. Daily work/journals? Yes No
11. Informal observations/mental notes? Yes No
12. Other:_____

(Please continue on back)

Which of the previously listed assessments do you feel are most helpful in evaluating your students?

_____

_____

Which assessments do you feel are least helpful?

_____

_____

Do you feel that your students are assessed: (please circle one)

too much just enough not enough

Do you feel pressure to teach "for the test"? Yes No

Comments or opinions about assessments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU!

Your time and responses will greatly help us in our research.

Please return this to _____ by _____

for a *sweet treat !*

Teacher researchers: Sarah Rhine Grade 1
Lisa Smith Grade 1

Appendix B

Dear Parents,

This quarter in first grade we have used a variety of ways to assess your child. Some of the ways have been shared with you as they were completed in class. Others we shared with you during conferences. We would like your opinion of the assessments listed below. Your feedback will help us know which assessment tools are the most beneficial to YOU as a parent.

Please rate each tool as to its helpfulness.

1 - Not very much 2 - Somewhat 3 - Very

Friday paper _____

Rubrics _____

Portfolio _____

Daily work _____

Report card _____

Teacher observations/comments _____

Comments_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for your time and assistance in our research!!

Sincerely,

(teacher researchers!)

Appendix C

Portfolio Form

I chose this for my portfolio because...

- ☐ I like it.
- ☐ I did my best.
- ☐ I learned something new.
- ☐ It was fun to do.
- ☐ I want to remember it.

Your own reason -

Appendix D

Name: _____

Opinion Rubric

	I love it!	I like it!	It's O.K.
Reading			
Writing			
Math			
Listening			
Talking			
Art			
Music			
Gym			

Appendix E

Name: _____

Most of the time	Some of the time	Hardly ever
1	2	3

___ I keep my hands and feet to myself.

___ I follow the school rules.

___ I am responsible.

___ I work and play well with others.

___ I work quietly.

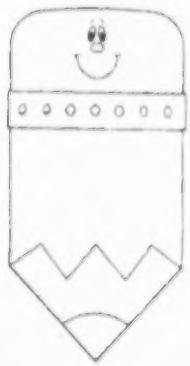
___ I listen to others.

___ I keep my supplies and books neat.

___ I follow the teacher's directions.

___ I finish my work on time.

___ I do my work neatly.



Appendix F

How Am I Doing? - Organization Rubric

Name:_____

Desk	A mess!	Could use some clean up!	Neato!!
Take home folder/library book at school	I really need to work on remembering.	I remember most of the time.	I remember every day.
Supplies	Not ready	Sometimes ready	Always prepared
Name on paper	Always forget	Pretty good	Always remember

Appendix G

Journal Writing Rubric

Student name:_____ Date:_____

Criteria	3	2-	2+	1
Capital and end punctuation	No capitals or punctuation	Has some capitals, no end punctuation	Capitalizes in the beginning, period at the end	All capitals and correct end punctuation
Complete sentences	Listing words	Writing sentence fragments	Complete sentences	Complete sentences with detail
Staying with the given topic	Writing words in random	Will write the given prompt or word, but does not connect it with the writing	Stays with the prompt	Describes the prompt in complete meaningful sentences
Number of sentences	zero	one	two	three or more

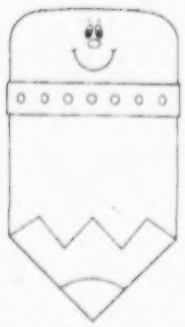
Appendix H

Listening Rubric

Student name:_____ Date:_____

Criteria	3	2	1
Directions	Has difficulty following directions	Sometimes follows directions	Follows directions without reminders
Interruptions	Often interrupts	Sometimes interrupts	Listens without interrupting
Attentiveness	Often inattentive	Usually attentive	Almost always attentive
Attention span	Short attention span	Appropriate attention span	Exceptional attention span

Appendix I



Name : _____

Date : _____

What did you learn this week ?

What were you good at this week ?

What could you have done better ?

My week was :

☆☆☆ Awesome

☆☆ Good

☆ O.K.

Appendix J

Student Observation Tallylist

Subject: _____

Date: _____

Assessment type:	Standardized	Performance
Nervousness		
Copying		
Distracted		
Crying		
Ask for help		
Doodling		
Gives up		
Fidgety		

Additional Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____